

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

COMRADE N. V. RANDOLPH

BEFORE

R. E. LEE CAMP, No. 1, C. V.

December 3, 1886.

Printed by Resolution of the Camp.

RICHMOND, VA.:

JOHNS & CO., STEAM BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS.

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SUBJECT.

“Origin, Growth and Present Condition of R. E. Lee Camp.”

OCCASION.

The opening of the new R. E. Lee Camp Hall.

After the routine business of the Camp had been finished, Commander Murphy introduced Comrade Randolph, the orator of the evening, who delivered the following address,



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ADDRESS.

Commander and Comrades of R. E. Lee Camp:

I was much surprised to learn a few days ago that by unanimous resolution of this Camp the honor had been conferred on me of delivering an address before you to-night, the occasion being the dedication of our new hall. I fear the mover of the resolution has allowed his personal friendship for the man to warp his better judgment; for certainly there are many members of the Camp who, more gifted by nature, could do the subject greater justice than I can, for no matter what else I may have claimed to be, I certainly never claimed to be an orator.

But, sir, when I entered R. E. Lee Camp in its early days, I did so with the determination to do my duty to the best of my ability, feeling that I could and would be of some service to my fellow man. The spirit that caused me to take an active part in your organization was the same that prompted me, when at fifteen years of age, to throw aside my school books and enlist in the Confederate army, determined to do my duty to my native State with all my soul and strength.

The subject for this address, as outlined in your resolution, is the "Origin, Growth and Present Condition of R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans," and certainly no more fit subject could have been selected.

To give a proper history of the origin of Lee Camp, it is necessary for me to go back to 1860—a year the events of which shaped the future of our country. When the statesmen of the country, returning from the "halls of Congress," told the people that all efforts to settle the vexed

old veterans find their way to the almshouses, there to die in want and be buried in pauper's graves.

But this was not to be so always, for there met by chance in March, 1883, seven old soldiers, separated for years in the different avocations of life, and in talking over former days of the war, the names of old comrades came to mind, and as name after name was mentioned, a large number were found to be in want and suffering. Then that spirit of charity born of dangers and hardships sprang up in their hearts, and they said surely, surely something can be done, something must and shall be done to put these old friends at least above the pangs of hunger and suffering. With this determination a notice was put in the daily papers calling on all Confederate soldiers in Richmond to meet, organize and start a soldiers' home, humble though it might be, but still a *soldiers' home*. On April 18, 1883, thirty-eight veterans met and organized R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans. Capt. Chas U. Williams was its first commander; Col. W. C. Carrington was its second commander; Gen. Jno. R. Cooke was its third commander, and Col. Jno. Murphy is its fourth and present commander.

Subsequent meetings were held, the organization was perfected and the work of the Camp was commenced. A committee was appointed to petition the legislature for a charter, and in it the life work of the Camp is so plainly laid down that I will read it:

"Whereas, an association of Confederate veterans has been organized in the city of Richmond, under the title of R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans, the object of which is declared in the by-laws of the association to be to perpetuate the memory of our fallen comrades and to minister as far as practicable to the wants of those who were permanently disabled in the service; to preserve and maintain that sentiment of fraternity born of the hardships and dangers shared in the march, the bivouac and on the battlefield. It is proposed not to prolong the animosities engendered by the war, but to extend to our late adversa-

ries on all fitting occasion courtesies, which are always proper between soldiers, and which in our case a common citizenship demands at our hands.

"We propose to avoid anything which partakes of partisanship in religion and politics, but at the same time we will lend our aid to the maintenance of law and the preservation of order."

Mr. Commander, I challenge any man living to say that the recitals in the charter have not been carried out to the letter. The fulfillment of that promise to extend to our former foes that courtesy due among soldiers to each other has brought together in pleasant reunion veteran posts of the North, who in accepting our invitations and visiting us and we in return going to their distant homes, has done more to break down the sectional feeling between the North and South and make us one people in fact as well as in name than all other influences combined.

The founders of Lee Camp had seen the associations of the Army of Northern Virginia meet in this city for thirteen years, composed of soldiers renowned in war and who testified in glowing terms to the valor and fortitude of the men who had done so much to win for them the stars and wreaths which they wore, yet not one had raised his voice in aid of the old and maimed Confederate soldier.

Lee Camp, the members of which were for the most part men who belonged to that honored class—the private soldier—had undertaken the work and proposed to push it to its completion.

It was decided to hold a "bazaar," and calling to its aid the noble women of Richmond, who are ever ready, like ministering angels, to help in the noble work of charity, the work was begun.

My friends, I cannot pass this point in our history without pausing to say a word in their praise, for well I remember the answer of these noble women when we asked them to help us: "Help you, Lee Camp! Lead and we will follow. Why, my father was a Confederate soldier, my son was a Con-

federate soldier, my husband was a Confederate soldier, and these men now in distress were their comrades, and we will do our part for their sake."

This was the same old spirit of love born in woman's heart for suffering man. It was the same love that carried her into the hospitals, and many a comrade now before me can bear testimony to the fact that he owes his life to her gentle ministrations. Among the many who came, there was one at the head, and I am confident that no pang of jealousy will spring in a sister's heart if I mention her name. With wonderful executive ability, indomitable energy, a sweet disposition, a gentle voice that many a wounded Confederate soldier has cause to remember, Mrs. Lewis N. Webb organized the bazaar and success was assured. From this source \$23,000 was raised.

It was determined to send out circulars asking aid from the friends and admirers of the Confederate soldiers who, having no government to look to, were dependent on the liberality of their friends. Then was presented to the world a sight that has never had its equal in the history of wars, and I thank God it was left for American soldiers.

Phil Kearney Post, G. A. R., stepped to the front, and, extending the right hand of fellowship, said: "Lee Camp, we belong to that grand army that for four years thundered at the gates of your beautiful city; time and again you repulsed us, and only when there was not men enough left to man your guns did you fail to drive us back. We know the material you are made of; we know your proud spirits will not ask us for aid; but we have come in that spirit of brotherly love—for are we not all Americans at last?—and all have done so much to make American valor illustrious, we will help you to build your soldiers' home." And help us they did. It was at their suggestion and with their endorsement that the circular was sent to the G. A. R. posts. The example set by Phil Kearney Post was followed by others, and letters of fraternal feeling, enclosing substantial aid, came from the North and West until \$8,000

was raised. And, sir, there comes to my mind the name of one man that I feel justified in paying tribute to. That man was Corporal James Tanner, of Brooklyn, a man who by the misfortune of war lost both legs, but what he lost in legs was made up in heart. This man came from his home to this city and opened the bazaar with a speech that most of you remember.

Then came a grand old man, tottering under the weight of years, with a smile of charity on his face, and said: "Lee Camp, I watched your course for four years; I saw you wage an unequal contest; I saw your armies go down to rise no more, and knowing you are still suffering from the effects of war, I want to do my share out of my abundance"; and the Hon. W. W. Corcoran handed us his check for five thousand dollars.

The example set by this great and good man was followed by others, until the total sum collected amounted to fifty-two thousand dollars.

Some of you may wish to know how your Board of Visitors have spent the money; if so, go to the Soldiers' Home, see that beautiful spot, with its home-like cottages, with its happy and contented veterans; you will then have all the answer you can wish.

Mr. Commander, I cannot better illustrate the growth of Lee Camp than to compare it to an old and familiar saying that each of us learned in our boyhood days—"Great oaks from little acorns grow." The acorn was planted by these seven veterans; they watched it tenderly; they saw it put forth its tender leaves, and they have lived to see its magnificent proportions.

My friends, it has grown until now seven hundred men constitute its massive body; its branches spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and under the shade of its beautiful foliage one hundred and thirty old veterans find protection and a home.

As Lee Camp grew to man's estate, that desire, born of Divine command, to increase, multiply and populate the

earth, came in its heart. So when its offspring arrived at age, they were sent on their mission of peace.

The first son, wandering to the historic fields of Fredericksburg, established Camp No. 2.

The second son marched up the Valley of Virginia, every foot of whose soil could tell a tale of valor, suffering and death, until, entering the town of Winchester, where so many gallant men had found a resting place before, pitched his tent and Camp No. 3 was established.

The third son, crossing the Blue Ridge, and as the sun set in the west over the beautiful town of Charlestown, West Virginia, determined to accept the hospitable invitation of its people, and Camp No. 4 was established.

The fourth son, launching his little boat on the bosom of the historic James, gently floated down the stream, passing the banks of Drury's Bluff, and remembering with pride the oft-told story of how Lee and Tucker with their sailor boys and a few old guns had belched forth defiance at the famous ironclads, and forced them to retreat under the guns of Fortress Monroe, until reaching that grand harbor of Norfolk he was welcomed to land, and Camp No. 5 was established.

The fifth son, seeking a warmer clime, found his way to the orange groves of Florida, and in the city of Jacksonville Camp No. 6 was established.

The sixth son, having heard his father tell of glories won on many a field by Hood and his gallant Texans, wandered away to the "Lone Star State," and in the city of Austin Camp No. 7 was established.

The seventh and last son, having heard of the wonders and glories of the western world, turned his face to the setting sun, and on the golden shore of California found congenial spirits and Camp No. 8 was established.

Thus you see, my friends, that the number of its offspring corresponds in number with the seven true and brave men who originated R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1.

Mr. Commander, do you wonder at its growth? Remem-

ber, the acorn was planted in the soil of Virginia, enriched with the blood of her bravest and noblest sons. It was the soil of Virginia that produced Stonewall Jackson, who, with his handful of foot cavalry, defeated in rapid succession four large and well equipped armies, and forced them from his native State to seek safety north of the Potomac; and last, sir, it was the soil of Virginia that produced our greatest chieftain, Robert E. Lee, in whose honor we are named.

Of its present condition, much can be said; but I would only be saying what most of you already know. I could tell you of its many deeds of charity; of the suffering and distress it has relieved and is still relieving; but I prefer to remind you that now is the time for work; now, while the light lasts and health and strength is ours, work with all our heart, that when we turn, as all of us must, on the downward slope of life, when our steps grow slow and the silver in our hair tells plainly that old age has come and we can no longer work, let us feel that we have made good use of our time, and have laid aside enough to keep ourselves and our old comrades from want.

Mr. Commander, the life of the Soldiers' Home is part and parcel of our lives, and the same care must be taken of its affairs that we take of our own. Who can tell, of those who listen to me to-night—who now with health and plenty, and has not given his old comrade a thought or a dollar—how soon he may find himself compelled to ask permission to enter Lee Camp Home? We have had two examples of this in the last sixty days—two men who refused to join the Camp; they did not then need it; they preferred to spend their time and money some other way; but sickness came, then want, and both are now appealing to us for help.

On many of you a kind Providence has bestowed a plenty of this world's goods. Will you in the day of your prosperity forget the old comrade of twenty-three years ago? Who before me can say that he does not owe his presence

here to-night to some old comrade who seeks admission to the Soldiers' Home?

Do you remember the day your brigade was hard pressed, the enemy driving you back, the left wing gave way and in a moment all would be lost? But hold! a cheer is heard; an officer advances to the front: "Hold your ground, boys, another brigade is coming," and with a yell that only a Confederate knew how to send up, they came to your relief, and the day was ours. Can you say that the man who now asks in his old age for support is not the man who, when you lay wounded on the battlefield, stopped to help you and with his last drop of water moistened your parched lips? Remember all this, my friends, and do your duty to them now as they did then to you.

Comrades, your Board of Visitors find themselves face to face with a difficult problem. Our income consists of ten thousand dollars, donated by the State of Virginia, which was intended to support eighty-three men; by strict economy and the products of our farm we are enabled to support one hundred and thirty men; but the limit of our ability is reached, and without further aid we must close the doors to over twenty applicants, with records accompanying their applications of which any man might be proud. My friends, it remains for you to say whether or not the home has reached the limits of its usefulness?

I want to do justice to the State of Virginia. When the bill extending aid to the Home was before the legislature a member, though not a soldier, said he did not think Virginia should support men from other States; then arose an old gray-haired man, who said: "Sir, that is not a question for debate; these men fought and bled on Virginia soil, and so long as we are able they shall not knock in vain for help."

I regret to say that not a Southern State has offered to help us, though we have men now in the home from nine States. The individual donations from Southern men have amounted to but little, and if we are to judge the future by

the past, we will have to look to the Camp and the State of Virginia for its entire support. We estimate that it costs one hundred and twenty dollars a year per man, and there are plenty of men in this hall to-night who can afford to contribute that amount towards so good a cause.

Five gentlemen have built memorial cottages at the Home at an average cost of twelve hundred dollars each. Four of them are citizens of Richmond, one of New York. Why cannot others do the same?

Twelve hundred dollars is not much to some men, particularly those who staid at home during the war and made their fortunes. The ingratitude of republics is proverbial, but misfortune often binds hearts together. Let us stand together now as we did years ago, and do our duty now as we did it then, and we can go on with the good work. Let it not be said of us that we have forgotten our old comrades in their distress, but rather let us set an example to future generations to follow.

Comrades, keep up your Soldiers' Home. Keep your old veterans in plenty and comfort. Keep them as the reminder of that dream of a sentiment that binds the past with the present. Keep it for sweet charity's sake, and let the recording angel write your name high in the Book of Life as "one who loved his fellow man."



